



Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission

Mankato City Hall – Minnesota River Room
10 Civic Center Plaza, Mankato, MN 56001

Minutes for October 26, 2022

APPROVED

Commissioners Present: Rick Anderson, Barry Wendorf, Bryan Pike (virtual), Jonathan Wolf, Jen Foley, Beth Pierce (virtual), Peg Furshong, Tom Stoa, Reid Huttunen, Tim Engrav, and Brad Bonk (virtual)

Commissioners Absent: Tom Ryan

Consultants Present: Renee Mattson - Executive Director, Joe Czapiewski – System Plan Coordinator, and Tess Dandrea - Administrative Assistant (virtual).

1. Call to Order by Chair Anderson at 10:01 am

2. Acknowledge Members of the Public in Attendance

Raven McKnight –Presenter (virtual), Metropolitan Council Associate Data Scientist
Brandon Wagenfeld – Student of Urban Studies at University of Minnesota (virtual)
Welcome by Mark Konz – Associate Director of Planning and Development Services, City of Mankato. Mark thanked the Commission for designation of the Greater Mankato River Valley Trail System. Mankato’s population is 43,000 and includes three Colleges, Bethany, Rasmussen, and Mankato State. They have made investments in the downtown and have acquired additional park land.

3. Approval of Agenda for October 26, 2022, Minutes from September 28, 2022, and Treasurer’s Report through September 2022

Motion by Engrav to approve the Agenda, Minutes and Treasurers Report

Second by Foley

Motion Approved

4. Executive Director’s Report – Spoke with Assistant DNR Commissioner Shannon Lotthammer about funding for the Commission’s operating budget as we currently must use grant dollars for this expense. The DNR would be the pass through agency for a Governor’s addition of funding for our operations and would not come out of any DNR agency funds. Pike asked if there would be any issues for us remaining in business if

there were a government shutdown at a future date? Mattson said there would be no interruption of our business as we operate under a grant and moving forward the funds would be treated in the same way. Wendorf liked the change of graphic designers and asked if this change comes at a cost? Mattson said we are actually saving \$1,000 and will continue to print copies of the report and will not just provide electronic copies to the Legislative committees to whom we report.

- 5. System Plan Coordinator's Report** - Noted that the meeting in Crookston was very helpful. There are several new folks since the project was funded so it was good to get everyone in the same room and discuss how things will continue to move ahead. Huttunen noted that the Crookston bid opening came in more than \$800,000 over budget and the project can be scaled down that will accomplish the bathroom/shower facility but will likely not include the storm shelter component. There may also be a scaling back of the number of campsites. Next meeting will be held with the group on November 18. Foley – questions about the cost of the Crookston project and how that will be resolved? Will the project change? Yes, but it must be approved by the Commission and an amendment to the contract made.

6. Items from Members and Letters to the Commission

11:20 Bonk joined meeting virtually

Pike – nothing

Bonk – just came from Brophy Park and it is coming along and looks great, and he also commented that these projects are a lot of work.

Pierce – nothing

Furshong – nothing

Wendorf – alternative transportation plans are available now and grants available for first round with finals due in January. Alternative funding available through MNDOT

Huttunen - Crookston project members will meet again on November 18 along with other involved communities with projects.

Wolf- was asked about Battle Point Park in Osakis and directed the person to the website and referred them to consultants.

Engrav – North Country National Scenic Trail in early planning stages in Ely area and, ATV NE MN master plan being developed, also an economic study and Joint Powers Board undertaking initiative. Trail counters being used. Is in support of StreetLight project.

Stoa - nothing

Foley - nothing

Anderson – has been working with the SRDC, he, along with Joe and Renee sat in some of the regional planning meetings for the SW MN 9 counties. The SRDC received a large grant from the Federal EDA to do some of that work.

Furshong – is also in support of StreetLight project and could we get a more specific count on diverse participants in one or two parks in Greater Minnesota. It was agreed DEI should be a priority. Mattson said we are getting a large amount of data for our

investment, and we have additional dollars to invest in this project. We could do more sampling in addition to the data the DNR collected this summer. Our parks get visitors from people all across the state.

7. New Business:

7.1 StreetLight Research Update by Raven McKnight

- StreetLight is the vendor providing the service for vehicle, bike, and pedestrian data for parks, however, trail specifics are not included, therefore a lot of work has been done to help with this part of the research. The project runs from June 2021 - June of 2023. The goal is to get park and trail counts and demographic information by using a location-based service where data is generated by smart phones to get geographic location. No personal data is collected, everything is anonymized. It is a collaborative project with Metropolitan Council, the DNR, and Greater Minnesota and paid for out of the Coordination Among Partners fund. The scale of the project includes 225 state and regional parks and 200-300 trails depending upon how you segment them, across the three systems and as well as 14 Greater Minnesota parks that are designation eligible. Each individual park map was edited for use in this project. This is very novel research, no one else is doing a project like this and certainly not of this scale, which means a lot of trial and error and methods are developed. There have been three major rounds of revision to our estimates, which means running more than 100,000 analyses.

Visitor Demographics

- Bike, pedestrian, and vehicles that enter and stay at least 5 minutes are counted but not how many people are in each vehicle.
- Visitor home location, demographic, and trip lengths are qualitative.
- It is not good for gathering information on gender, age nor minors, as their privacy is protected.
- Validated at 10 metropolitan regional parks that did surveys in summer 2022 and were oversampled.
- Year over year increased visitation from 2019 -2021.
- Useful for guiding future research.
- Can see diversity of people using parks, summaries for each park and park-level demographics
- Total visitation per park by month, week and day, mode, time of day, weekdays, and weekends.
- StreetLight is replacing baseline manual counts with an unprecedented number of details.
- Will compare in-person surveys with StreetLight data.
- We are on the leading edge of collecting this type of data as no other states have this scale of data.

- A conversation was held about how to capture the count if multiple people are in a car. A multiplier is used, the DNR used 3, but their recent survey now indicated 2.7. Could we get more specific StreetLight data on our districts to show the usage of all Minnesota residents who visit to our parks? We need to do more research in our parks, maybe pick one in each district to start. Use Census identifiers of income for our questions and should line up better. Met Council did not do that.
- Discussion of the Met Council about sampling as it applies to confidence in the StreetLight numbers.
- Mattson explained we have funding and could do more. Our project is unique for the scale and scope.
- What can we do with research in parks adjacent to a State Park.
- Commission requests that the StreetLight study be continued.

7.2 Commissioner Appointments for 2023

Discussion of service and should terms be altered to offset expiring terms. Pike offered to serve a two-year term if state allows. Mattson will research terms changes. Instructions will be sent for how to reapply for a position.

8. Old Business:

8.1 Fiscal Year 2024 Funding Recommendations

Discussion about the breadth of the projects and the geographic distribution. Could we ensure future funding for Hole in the Mountain? Will they be able to expand the scope and the amount of funding.

Three projects that are not recommended for funding:

- Hole in the Mountain
- Wannigan Regional Park
- Greater Mankato River Valley Trail System

Motion by Furshong to approve the funding recommendations as presented, with the exclusion of Isanti Springvale County Park, which will be voted on separately due to a member conflict and a roll call vote will be held.

Second by Engrav

Motion Approved unanimously in a roll call vote.

Motion by Furshong to approve the funding application for Isanti Springvale County Park

Second by Wolf

Motion Approved unanimously via a roll call vote with one abstention

Motion by Furshong to not fund Hole in the Mountain Park for FY24, but to use their score from 2021 in any future application of projects assuming the scope is comparable.

Second by Wendorf

Motion Approved in a unanimous roll call vote.

9. Approval of October Expenses

Commissioner \$ 2,721.57

Consultants \$32,325.56

Total **\$35,047.13**

Motion by Wendorf to approve October expenses

Second by Furshong

Motion Approved

10. Next Meeting and Agenda Items

Zoom meeting on November 23rd from 9:00 to 10:00am

January meeting at the Little Falls Initiative Foundation building, if available, for Strategic planning.

Meeting adjourned at 1:32 pm

Greater Minnesota Regional Parks and Trails Commission
Director's Report for October 2022

Partner Meetings

- GMPT Newsletter Article
- GMPT Communications Committee
- PTLAC Liaison's Calls

Park/Trail Visits

- Crookston - Joe and I met with representatives of the JPB Red Lake River Corridor to discuss the multiple projects under funding ID 18-026F. It may be necessary to get an extension from the legislature during the upcoming session. Project bids have come back well over budget and need to be revisited as to scope and cost. We plan to attend (virtually) upcoming meetings with the group to ensure we're knowledgeable about how things are proceeding.
- Sartell Sauk River Regional Park – Mai Neng Moua and I met with Sartell park staff and the representative from SEH who has been managing the project to do the project close out walk through. You will recall that this grant was awarded by the DNR prior to the Commission being established and making grants. We also toured this park a few years ago after a Commission meeting in Sartell. It's a nice park but would likely never receive regional designation. The improvements include a picnic shelter at the river, a paved walking trail from the parking lot to the picnic shelter and two miles of mountain bike trails.

Grant Status Report Follow Up

With GMRPTC taking over the grant status updates, and increasing the update requirements from once to twice annually, we're getting more detail on how grant projects are coming and can address issues that arise and provide some help and guidance if necessary.

Followed up with two survey respondents that indicated projects might need extended deadlines, Kathy George at Sandstone with Robinson Quarry Park and Amber Moon Peterson at Nisswa and their section of the Gull Lake Trail. Both projects have come back with bids much higher than anticipated and over their grant awards. Both also plan to rebid the projects in the next few months as both had bid them in spring, not the greatest time. I've gone over what will need to happen to get a grant extension and we'll wait to move on that until after the November 8 elections provide some clarity about representation.

Grand Openings in Duluth

Duluth Hartley Nature Center celebrated the grand opening of the expanded nature center classroom space with a community celebration and ribbon cutting on October 17. I represented the GMRPTC with remarks and I'm happy to say the city made a very nice

recognition of the Commission and the Legacy grant received to build the classrooms, add safer access with new sidewalks and add much needed wayfinding on the trails.

Duluth Traverse also celebrated the conclusion of work done on the trail with GMRPTC Legacy funding on October 19. I was not able to attend that ribbon cutting but again, the city made a very nice recognition of the Legacy funding received.

Local media were in full attendance at the events and below is one clip from Hartley's celebration.

<https://www.wdio.com/front-page/top-stories/hartley-nature-center-building-expansion-and-park-improvements/>

Mountain Bike Trail Design Standards

This long awaited design guide continues to inch along toward completion. Jake Carsten, our author, is mostly done with the writing, with just some tweaking of sections currently. Photo collection is mostly complete as well. The biggest hold up at this point is getting IMBA staff fully engaged with their part of the review process. They've had a busy fall travel schedule and it's definitely slowed us down. From IMBA review it goes to the copy editor for style consistency, punctuation, grammar, etc. As sections are done with final review we'll start submitting them to Evolve Creative for design to keep the process moving forward. The committee has reviewed the guide and has submitted some good comments and suggestions and they are wrapped up. I've been working with Jake weekly to review sections and nail down photos choices. At this point we'll finalize the cover design so it can be included in the 2022 Policy and Planning Report.

2022 Policy and Planning Report

This is our annual report due to the Legacy Committees in the House and Senate. The report is due no later than January 15. While other agencies submit their reports in electronic version, we have always hand delivered the report and followed up with the electronic copy. I have completed the writing and photo selection process and hoping to have the cover to show at the meeting. We changed creative agencies this year and engaged with Evolve Creative for this report as well as the mountain bike design manual. Our previous reports were great and well received, but I felt they were getting a little stale and wanted to get some new creative energy.

GMRPTC
System Plan Coordinators Report
October 2022

FY24 Funding Application

We have completed our due diligence for the remaining funding applications. After careful consideration, we are recommending a funding package that we believe is reasonable, achievable, fair, and achieves great things for Greater Minnesota.

Reviews and Technical Assistance

A number of new potential applicants have been in touch this month, looking for information about the designation process and asking for advice about their potential. The level of interaction varied from emails back and forth to in-depth Zoom meetings and review of basic information. While not representing everyone I talked to, the ones I was able to record were all in southern Minnesota:

- Prairie Woods Environmental Learning Center
- City of St. James
- City of Cottonwood
- City of Owatonna

A couple of consultants also contacted us to learn more about the process on behalf of their clients. I don't always get information on who that is until later in the process.

Renee and I met with representatives from the Red Lake River Corridor in Crookston. There has been very significant staff turnover across the system, so we helped them catch up on Commission structure. There is an active Legacy grant that includes many of the corridor's partners, which has already received an extension. We helped them understand what needed to be done to be successful with that project, particularly regarding project components that came in significantly over bid.

No new Designation Applications or Master Plans have been submitted this month.

District Outreach

Chair Rick Anderson, Renee Mattson, and I attended a Zoom kickoff presentation for the Southwest Minnesota Regional Trails Plan. The meeting was fairly well attended by a number of agencies across the region. We will encourage our regional partners from the study area to participate in the process, as well as continuing to monitor it ourselves.

As a regional plan, it was great to see how closely they were trying to draft their goals and guidelines based on existing guidance, including our Strategic Plan.

Consultant Projects

Renee and I met with Full Circle Group to kick off the next phase of Data Management System development. As discussed last month, this phase will help create a needed CRM, Customer Relationship Management system, allowing us to better manage our communications, reporting and track contacts with all of our regional partners.

We also met with our campground user survey consultants from the Southwest Regional Development Commission. They were closing out the data collection and showed us a first look at the results. Additional analysis needs to be completed before the report is done.

Our thanks to Karen Umphress, who has been busy going through our website to update pictures and files, fix broken links, and make sure it is a great looking front door to our organization!